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ABSTRACT

This document is a transcription of a radio presentation "Options in Education," from June 20, 1977. It deals with various aspects of high school graduation, and includes interviews with teachers, parents, and a number of graduating students. Among the topics discussed are feelings about graduation, future plans, and attitudes toward the senior prom. Various segments of the preparation, as well as the actual graduation ceremony, are mixed in with the interviews and commentary. The result is a fascinating picture of an American high school graduating class in 1977. (BP)

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Options in Education

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Mergenthaler High:

The Class of 1977

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Program #82, June 20, 1977

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("Graduation Days" - Freshmen Favorites, The Four Freshmen, Capitol SM-743)

GRADUATE: Well, it just makes you feel important. It makes you feel like you've accomplished something. You put school as a mountain, and you're at the bottom. After twelve years, you've finally made it, and it's a really big accomplishment. You put your flag on top of the mountain. You made it!

TEACHER: Well, I've had many of them who have come to this office complaining about school, and talked about, "I'll be glad when I get out of here." And, then, come back and say, "They really missed this place. And really did not realize that this was one of the better times of their life.

TEACHER: They're ready for the job market. In many cases, the job market is not ready for them. Now, they may or may not have enough skill for a particular job. That's not the point. The point is they are now expected by society to stand on their own two feet.

GRADUATE: It's good to leave because I've been through so much. And I'm glad that it's over with.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow.

BLAIR: And I'm Wendy Blair.

MERROW: And, as you've probably guessed by now, this week's OPTIONS IN EDUCATION, in keeping with the season, is about The Class of 1977, this year's crop of graduates on this our annual Graduation Program.

BLAIR: More specifically, this is going to be a program about graduating from one high school - Mergenthaler High School. It's in Baltimore, Maryland and it has a good mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds - Polish, Italian, Black, even Vietnamese - most of whom come from working class families.

MERROW: In many ways, it's a representative sample. Students at Mergenthaler are similar in aspirations and background to most high school graduates, and they're graduating like everybody else. The tradition is something that seems to transcend race, religion, geography, and even time.

BLAIR: Things haven't changed much. Graduation is one of the constants on the map of American social institutions. In this portrait of Mergenthaler High: The Class of '77, prepared by David Selvin, we're reminded that graduations are a beginning as well as an end, and that parting is, indeed, such sweet sorrow.

TEACHER: Every year you get attached to them, and you do miss them, and you think that, "Gee. There's no one who can replace these kids that you're losing." And, yet, there's a new group that comes every year, and you feel the same way.

STUDENT: We're finally getting our chance to make our place.

SELVIN: Has what you've learned here going to help you do that?

STUDENT: Yes, definitely. Because I wouldn't be able to go out and do anything, you know, without the training. It's really helped me a lot.

SELVIN: What is that that they're filling out?

STUDENT: Autograph books.

SELVIN: Why do you have an autograph book?

STUDENT: Memories. You know, we probably will never look at it, but you'll remember everybody anyway, you know. But you can just remember back.

SELVIN: Maybe you could read some of those for me.

STUDENT: Oh, well. Okay. "Terry, you've been a good friend, and I'm glad that I've known you. I wish you all the success and happiness that you can possibly have. Good luck, Judy." No, you can't hear this one, or that one either. "Still crazy, but fun-to-be-around person. I wish you the best of luck in the years to come."

SELVIN: Ten years from now, what do you think you're going to be doing? And how do you think you're going to feel about this school?

STUDENT: In ten years, I'll probably be working in some type of business field. Secretary, or something like that. And I'll probably . . .

SELVIN: You're not really sure about what you want to do?

STUDENT: No. (laughter) But it's what I took, and, you know, I'm good at it, pretty good at it. And it's money. I want to do it, but I feel that there's something better for me out there than just sitting in an office all day.

SELVIN: Like what?

STUDENT: Well, I want to get into photography. But there are different things for everybody. But I feel the same way now. You know, when I go out and go to work, I'm going to still feel that this school really did a good job, the teachers and everybody. And, you know, the rules are really heavy - heavier than most of the schools in the city, but it was worth it.

SELVIN: Let's say ten years from now, you know, when you're sitting at your desk typing, and you think back - maybe you look back through your autograph book, what are you going to think?

STUDENT: I'm going to think about the people I knew, and the difference there was between me now and me then. And probably wish I was back here.

(The Mergenthaler High Chorus)

TOM NICHOLS

TEACHER: This is Tom Nichols. Tom is going to graduate #1 in our school.

SELVIN: Does it make any difference to you when you go out to look for a job to say, "I graduated first in my class."

NICHOLS: Well, I haven't told anybody yet. I told my parents, and that was it.

SELVIN: You mean you've gone on job interviews, and you haven't mentioned that?

NICHOLS: No.

SELVIN: You're modest. What's the experience been when you've been on job interviews so far?

NICHOLS: Well, I've gone on IBM, and that was a long interview, and they're not hiring in Baltimore right now. And then I went on Amtrak, and I have to go down there again for another interview. It's a pretty interesting company. And an electronics module corporation, and I didn't like that job.

SELVIN: Are you discouraged at all?

NICHOLS: A little.

SELVIN: Explain.

NICHOLS: Well, I wanted to go to college, too, and get a job maybe, a good paying job that would be worth working one or two years so I could then go to college as long as I needed to.

* * *

MORE GRADUATES

STUDENT: Well, I've already been accepted at Essex, but I've been on job interviews, too, but I haven't got a job yet. But I am set to go to college.

SELVIN: Are you going to college because you can't get a job?

STUDENT: That's one reason, but another reason is -- If I can't get a job now, what's the sense of sitting home and stagnating, and I'll forget what I know already, and this way I can progress because I went on two interviews so far, and I haven't gotten a job from them. And they really depressed me because I felt like I didn't know enough. I should have been taught more. I won't mention any names, but some of the things I should have been taught that wasn't taught to me - because I'm not knocking any teachers but they need better teachers. Every school does. You always have teachers who just don't know how to teach. And they might know the field they're in, but they don't know how to teach it, how to get it across. And that's the problem that I came upon.

STUDENT: Well, I applied to a lot of local restaurants and all that, but no response. It's sort of like I've applied, filled out applications, and it's like wait for them to call, one of those things. And, as of now, no response.

TEACHER: If they don't get a job, then they start getting bored, and, then, of course, they get married because they're bored. They think, "Well, this is the end for me. The end of the world is coming!" And, then, when they reach 23 and 24, then they know it isn't. It's there. It's there for them.

TEACHER: It's the big pivot point. From here on they're no longer dependent on their parents. Many of them are getting married, starting homes of their own - if not immediately, within a year or so. In fact, some are already. One of my students left early today to go pick up his wife and baby at the hospital. So, this is new. This is a change from the past. Before, we'd have put him out of school. And instead of finishing his education. Many of them are leaving, surprisingly. Quite a few of the guys are going into the military because now that there's no draft, and with the job market being what it is, it does give them an opportunity to get some experience and to get a job that's paying. But it is a real big turn-around for them, emotionally, socially, and in everyway. They're not going to have somebody riding their tails for not doing what's expected. They either produce or that's it.

TEACHER: When they go out there, they think no one likes them until they get situated, get level-headed, and then they find out that it all did help.

* * *

TEACHER: I told the kids I missed them. I missed the ones who aren't here now, and they've only been gone a week. You do miss them. When students are good, and they do the work, and they appreciate what you have done, it makes you feel good. It really does.

SELVIN: But there'll be a new batch next year.

TEACHER: There will be a new one next year, and we'll work them just as hard I guess. I guess that's what's in us, us teachers. I don't know. It's just the idea that we're there, and we want to pass on everything to them.

SELVIN: Do you ever worry about not having done enough?

TEACHER: I feel that way. I feel that there's something I could have told them a little more, but it's hard to try to give them everything.

TEACHER: I was really very, very close to the graduating class of '72, and these young people chipped in and gave me a gift, and things like that. At the graduation ceremony, I made the statement that it was probably the most thrilling thing that ever happened to me, working with that group. And I will not take that back. And I've been, like, through marriage and all my own rituals of graduation and things, but knowing, as close as I did, those 500 youngsters was just a tremendous thrill. And I still am in touch with a lot of them. They call me, and we write. And they stop in and see us once in a while. Yes, you do. Your life really gets wrapped around working with the kids, and they become part of your life, and you hate to see them go. So, it's really a deep feeling, you know.

* * *

(Business Discussion of Prom Planning & Graduation Ceremony)

SELVIN: Graduating a class of 500 people doesn't seem like the smoothest operation.

TEACHER: No, it's not.

SELVIN: What are some of the problems you run into?

TEACHER: One of the biggest problems is there is so much to be done that it's too much work for only two people to handle. Consequently, we have Elsie and Milt helping us with various things. Elsie collects the dues for us, and keeps all the financial records. And that leaves us free to take care of other things. I have been handling the caps and gowns, arrangements for that, and for the paper products - the announcements, name cards, that type of thing. While Bill has been handling the Senior Prom.

SELVIN: It's like throwing a very big, elegant party.

TEACHER: Yes, yes. Very big, very big. But it's been a lot of fun. I enjoy working with the kids, and at times it gets to be a great hassle because there is so much to do, but I have really enjoyed it. In fact, I wouldn't mind doing it again.

SELVIN: Why is it important that the graduation go smoothly?

TEACHER: Well, it's not everyday that you graduate, and this is one of the few very special times in a child's life. This is the end of twelve long years of hard work. And we want everything to be perfect for them.

STUDENT: It means a lot. The way I feel, I'm proud of myself. My parents are proud of me, and I think everybody else should feel the same way.

SELVIN: What about the Prom, the cap and gown, all that?

STUDENT: Oh, that's going to be great. It's just going to be really wild because it really means a lot to me after twelve years. You know, I've worked hard for twelve years.

SELVIN: What about the Class of '77? Are they normally well-adjusted people?

TEACHER: As much as anybody else is. After all, they're the product of a society. So, if they are looney, then society must be looney. They're every bit as bright. I think we're becoming better able to identify those that have problems, and we're concentrating on them, and so that focuses the spotlight on them even more. But it doesn't really mean that there are not as many bright kids. We know that in any large group there are so many who are average, so many who are slow, and so many who are superior. And that's going to be true at any time. They have more knowledge available to them. They have access to information that our grandparents never even thought about. That makes a difference. I don't think they're any smarter or any dumber, if you want to use that term. But they may be somewhat different, but they're human beings, the same basic requirements out of life. There are those, and always will be, who will want a lot for a little, and that sort of thing. But I suppose that we're in as good hands as we've ever been. We've weathered a lot of problems before. We'll do it again.

TEACHER: We have 511 Seniors that are being considered for graduation. Of course, all of those will not make it. There will be a few. Because this is a week of final exams, and we generally lose 20-30 people during those final exams. The class started out three years ago as probably around 1100. So, we've been very concerned about our drop-out rate, and what happens to the 50% of the young people who don't make it.

SELVIN: What does happen to them?

TEACHER: Well, they do get married. They move. Some of them simply drop out of the picture by getting absorbed into the work world, I guess. We try to do some follow-up. They move out of state. We don't always get replies on, you know ,what happens. Our job is to keep these youngsters in school, but it gets down to this final week, and I'm working with a 511 figure, but after final exams, one day has been set aside each day this week for different exams. English one day, history, math and so on. So, those teachers will, then, grade those exams, and inform the counsellors about what young people will not be making it for various reasons.

So, what we're striving for is there will be a farewell to the school. The seniors will be finished as of Monday, May 23rd. They'll then finish their formal classes. There'll be a rehearsal where they're getting ready for this farewell to the school, and then they'll come back Thursday morning, May 26th, and we'll have a Farewell Assembly. And the 11th graders will be invited to participate in this. At that time there will be various scholarship awards. They'll be recognized for the things they've done these years, and, generally, some singing and just a farewell to the school.

TEACHER: Today, you will get all those things straightened out that you've been waiting for. Your Prom tickets are here. Your graduation tickets. Your favors, your cap and gown. Everything will be coming to you, but you just have to be a little patient.

The first order of business, some of you still did not listen to us. You did not clear up your obligations, and Miss Hansen has a list of those people who owe one or more obligations to the school. Listen.

MISS HANSEN: Listen when I call your names, please. The first list I have are people who have obligations with the library. If I call your name, please get up now, and go to the library, and clear it. The librarian has given us your names. So, if there's a problem about it, you'll have to straighten it out with her. You can't straighten it out with me. All I have is your name. I don't know what the problem is. First of all, Larry Arvin, you're cleared. Is Larry Arvin here? You're cleared, and your clearance note is down here on my table, if you'll pick it up. Joseph Anderson, $12.14, Steve Bailey, $12.05, George Battle, $12.15 . . .

TEACHER: All right, people, this bulletin is a corrected copy of the one you received last Friday. There were some errors, and the bulletin was done over and corrected. This is the official one now. You read at the top. It says, "Disregard any previous bulletin." Read this bulletin carefully, and follow all of the instructions. Already, there are some people violating the school dress code today. We could send you home. Don't make a mistake and figure that you'll get away with it Thursday because you won't.

All right. You know where you are now. The rehearsal is the first item. Senior Farewell Assembly. We're having that right now. We should be out of here, if you cooperate, before one o'clock. So, those of you who have appointments, don't get excited. Tomorrow you do not have any school provided we get this rehearsal done and everything's okay. You will return on Thursday morning, and report to the gymnasium at 8:15 AM in the proper dress. Okay. Ladies are to wear white or light colored pastel dresses. Anyone wearing slacks, shorts, or bare midriffs will not be permitted to take part. You'll be asked to leave the school grounds. There's a suggestion here that ladies should carry a small, clutch purse as we do not have the facilities to check all of these things. In case of

rain, a room will be provided in which you can place your rain coats and umbrellas.

Men, you're expected to wear a suit or sport coat, and slacks with a shirt and tie. We had to put the slacks in there because some people would show up with just a coat, you know.

REHEARSAL FOR THE SENIOR FAREWELL ASSEMBLY

TEACHER: This is a Farewell Assembly, and, as you will recall, in the traditi of Mergenthaler, the Farewell Assembly is for the Seniors, and invited Juniors. I understand we have some former graduates and parents in the auditorium. This program is not for them. And we request that they leave the auditorium.

TEACHER: Unfortunately, as you can see, the Senior Class takes up one-half of the auditorium. If your parents were invited, there would not be room for them. So, guests from the outside the school are not invited and may not attend the Farewell Assembly. Please do not have a parent or friend embarrassed by being refused admission to the Assembly.

TEACHER: For many of our students, this will be the only time they'll walk down an aisle and get a diploma, and rather than being able to look back and be able to say, "This was a day that I'm proud of. There was a lot of dignity." Many of them are going to have to say, "This is a day that I look on when there was hooting and hollering in the auditorium, and confetti was thrown, and I really didn't work as hard as I could have to get it." But they're not a problem as much as the parents and friends who maybe never graduated off a stage themselves, and haven't been oriented to the kind of program.

(Rehearsing the Processional)

TEACHER: Last year we spoke with the Senior Class and asked them if they would like to redo the program, or make it more meaningful to them, and they really seemed to like the ritual. They liked the music and the flags. But they also liked to feel that they're not inhibited by structure, and I said to them last year, "You seem like a conundrum or a contradiction to me. A living contradiction." And they said, "Well, we like to feel that this is a graduation that goes through all the rituals of graduation, but we don't want to be restricted by rules." So, we all just smiled and said, "We think we understand." But we really didn't.

THE FAREWELL ADDRESS

TEACHER We must encourage you to walk through the doors of Mergenthaler, a citizen bearing the best training that our school has offered. We must insist that you appear a significantly different person than when you first entered. You entered as a high school student. You will leave as a high school graduate, reflecting the finest . . . (applause) . . . . that your community through this educational institution has been able to give. Wear the name well! For, now, you carry a part of us with you.

STUDENT: Faculty, administrators, graduates and underclassmates. I'm not going to take up too mush time because I know that you are very interested in getting out of here. I am too. I would like to say that all of us have changed in the last twelve years. Some of us more than twelve years. I would just like to say that the task is not over yet. The hardest task is getting out there and making it on your own. I know that with the knowledge and skills that Mergenthaler has given you, you are ready to accomplish your obligations with no trouble whatsoever. I would like to also add that I have enjoyed working with all of you as your Class President. Good luck in the future... (applause)... Now you will hear from Mister and Miss Senior.

MISS SENIOR: The Senior Class of 1977 will present to our school a gift of five hundred dollars. One hundred dollars will be used to recondition the airconditioning units in our school office...(applause)...

Mr. SENIOR: Also, two hundred dollars will be donated for a music scholarship and a few hundred dollars will also be donated for our scholarship. Thank you...(applause)...

(Solo)

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MERROW: If, as we said at the beginning of the program, graduation is a bitter sweet occasion, the thing that sweetens it the most, at least in the short run, is the Senior Prom.

BLAIR: The Prom suffered setbacks during the sixties. But in the seventies, it has become big business, just as it was in the fifties.

MERROW: The popular places that catered a Prom are already reserved for next year. Some seniors, this year, paid as much as five hundred dollars a couple for their one night of fun.

BLAIR: It's a sort of orgy, of conspicuous consumption.

MERROW: Its the inflation that makes it seem so orgiastic. When I was a senior, it cost about ten dollars to rent a tux. Now, a respectable tuxedo would cost five times that much, just to rent it.

BLAIR: But proms, like graduation itself, have undergone few changes over the years. For instance, they still have chaperones.

MERROW: You're what is commonly known as a chaperone for the evening?

CHAPERONE: You could say that, yes.

MERROW: You don't look like you're enjoying this as much as they are.

CHAPERONE: Oh surely, I enjoy watching the kids come in, dressed completely different then what they normally would dress like.

MERROW: You've never seen them dressed like this before?

CHAPERONE: No, not quite.

MERROW: What is being a chaperone consist of being?

CHAPERONE: Well, making sure that everything goes along smoothly.

MERROW: It' like keeping the boys away from the girls.

CHAPERONE: No, no, they really have a good time.

MERROW: How about the way they're dressed?

CHAPERONE: Well, you're used to seeing the kids in jeans. To see them dressed like this is really nice.

MERROW: This has very little to do with school. What is the connection?

CHAPERONE: Well, the social gathering more than anything. It's their last big fling of the year. The last get-together as a group.

MERROW: Their last big fling before what?

CHAPERONE: Well before, I guess, going out to work, getting married, going in the service, whatever.

MERROW: They just sort of have a good time now while they can.

CHAPERONE: Sure. And their graduation will be in about three days. Then they are on their own completely.

CHAPERONE: It's the end of studying, the beginning of the working world. And I think that really that's what the Prom is all about. It's a new beginning for them. It's an end and a new beginning at the same time.

MERROW: I think this is maybe the last time you're going to see them. You think it's the last time their going to see one another?

CHAPERONE: Some of them will keep in touch and some of them won't see each other again. In maybe twenty years, or ten, they might have a reunion, but who knows.

* * * * * *

TEACHER: The attire for the evening is semi-formal. This means, either a short or long evening outfit for the girls, and a tuxedo or suit for the men. Any of you who have young men as dates who are in the military, a military uniform is considered the proper dress.

STUDENT: Well, their are a lot of preparations you have to make. First, the clothes that you're going to wear, what new colors, what styles, what you are going to wear and match it up with your date. There's ideas like getting film for your camera or materials that you will want to take to the Prom to be prepared, a car and so forth. You have to get your hair done at a certain time. Attend all the parties or whatever is going to be given. So, you really have to organize yourself ahead of time. But nothing really works out the way you planned it.

TEACHER: It's really a combination of twelve years of something they have been forced to do, by their family and friends: go to school. It's a big coming-out for them, and they're going to do it as best they can. They're going to dress-up. Some of these kids probably spend two to three hundred dollars just ot dress-up.

MERROW: I can't believe that. Two or three hundred dollars to dress-up?

TEACHER: Oh yes. Not just to dress, but the flowers, the dinner that goes with it afterwards. Some of these kids spend fifty, sixty dollars for shoes.

MERROW: You were talking before about renting a limousine?

TEACHER: Yes, there are probably some of our kids that will come in chauffeured limousines, and they will rent those for an evening. I guess those will cost seventy-five to hundred dollars.

* * * *

SENIOR: We're now Seniors. Being a Senior is what most of us have waited for and looked forward to. Especially the activities of a senior, such as the Senior Prom, which will be held tonight...(applause)...

TEACHER: I guess that if you're not an outstanding athlete, which is one way to get recognition, this is another way to get recognition from their peers. To have a chauffeured limousine drive up and have the chauffeur open the door for he and his date. All of the kids feel: it's to have the good time that you can in this life, because it's not all roses out there. I think that's probably what they're doing. It's a way to let loose and it's accepted. In fact, it's probably expected. We go through certain phases in life, marriage and so on, and this probably is one big affair that leads them into young manhood and womanhood. It's just accepted all over and their going to do it up as big as they can and they do.

STUDENT: It's something special that we won't be able to see again. A senior year. Something to think about in later years.

TEACHER: Something special that a person who's graduating only has once in a lifetime. You never see it again.

CHAPERONE: This is my second prom. I went to one up in Delaney's, and Delaney's one of the best. It's just that it's something that does come once in a lifetime, but this is my second turn at it and I hope this one is better.

MERROW: Describe what you're wearing tonight.

STUDENT: A blue tuxedo.

MERROW: It's not just a blue tuxedo.

STUDENT: No, it has ruffled edges and it cost forty bucks.

MERROW: How much did it cost you to come to this Prom tonight?

STUDENT: About fifty dollars

STUDENT: It cost me about sixty-five, well let's say it cost several hundred...

MERROW: Alright, but I'm not very good at mathematics, but it's about two hundred and fifty dollars for four of you. It's a lot of money.

STUDENT: So, it's worth it.

MERROW: That's the question: why is it worth it?

STUDENT: Because it's our Senior Prom and you put that on the air. It's one in a lifetime thing.

MERROW: Which brings up another question. Where are you going after that?

STUDENT: That's none of your business (laughter)...So what are you saying. That we shouldn't spend our money on our prom?

STUDENT: I mean, that's tne American way of life. You make money, you spend it, right? That's the only way to do it. You just can't keep it all tied up, right?

STUDENT: Because it's an enjoyment. and when you make money, you enjoy it, right? Got to work to make it, so you spend it and enjoy it.

* * * * *

TEACHER: At the very beginning of the Prom, as soon as you get there, you can have all the soft drinks and all the pretzels and potato chips you want. Now, at ten-thirty, there will be a buffet-super. You will get up from your table, wherever you're sitting, go to this long table where all kinds of hot food is going to be served to you. You eat all you want, go back as many times as you want, and you sit at your place again. At eleven o'clock,the ice-cream parlor opens up and you get any kind of ice-cream you want, banana splits, chocolate nut sundays...all you can eat.

* * * * *

STUDENT: We have a nice time. A nice time.

MERROW: What makes this better than any other party you could go to?

STUDENT: Maybe because it's the Class of '77.

MERROW: There'll never be another

STUDENT: I guess not, never like this one.

* * * * *

MERROW: There may, indeed, never be another class like the Class of '77.

BLAIR: Until 1978.

MERROW: However, their chances of finding work after graduation are better than those who graduated in 1976. Nonetheless, the 13.6% of unemployment rate among young people in this country is almost twice the national average.

BLAIR: If that's not difficult enough, these seniors, who have for so long, been treated as children by the school they're leaving, are now expected to behave as adults, in an adult world. Because, that school has graduated them.

MERROW: But to those who graduated, these contradictions, these ironies, didn't seem to exist.

TEACHER: One kid was so funny. He was just cleared of graduation today, and I saw him and said "can you be at the Civic Center at seven o'clock". He said, "well, I don't have a ticket to get in", and I said "just answer me, can you be here", and he said "yes, I can be there". I said, "well now, there are many seats in the back row and you're a little short, but I'll let you sit there", and he started to talk and all he could do was stutter...

SELVIN: There's a chance you weren't going to graduate?

STUDENT: That's right. All my friends were going to be here and I thought to myself "Oh God, I'm not going to be here, I'm a misfit or something". So, Mr. Grady, the counsel brought the report cards out and he showed me that I passed it with a 6[illegible] ..the skin of my teeth and not theirs. So I said, "what's going on here" and she said "well, here's your announcement and all your stuff" and I said "I'm going to gra...grad...". She said "Yes! you're going to graduate!" and I said "good!"

SELVIN: How do you feel?

STUDENT: Me? How do I feel right now? I'm the happiest guy in the whole world. I feel like a million bucks right now!

SELVIN: How would you have felt if you hadn't been here tonight? That's really the question. You really didn't think you were going to be here tonight.

STUDENT: I knew that if I wasn't going to make it tonight, I'd be really depressed and all. Because, like I said before and I'll say it again, all my friends were graduating and I would like to graduate with the. So I might feel like a person who doesn't know anything, if I didn't. The main thing is that my math teacher did not mark...well, he got to the exams just a little bit late, a couple days rather, and so I went in there and noticed that he finally graded it. I looked at it, I took a glance at it. He showed it to me: "Here's a sixty" and I said "I passed it".

SELVIN: And you're here tonight.

STUDENT: And I'm here tonight.

SELVIN: Do you have a cap and gown?

STUDENT: Well that's what I'm still waiting for from Miss Hansen. My parents are here. I told them about it. I came home. I was riding my bike home...I finally got home and I told one of the little kids that live with me "where's mom and dad?" , my little brother told me that my mother was in the house. I went into the living room and I said "Mom, how's that for you?" and she said "Oh my God, you're graduating!" My sister jumped up, she gave me a kiss. My mother did the same thing. I went over to my neighbor's house, he saw me coming out, I was right in the middle of the street and I said "Dad, I made it!" I went over there, I showed him the certificates and...it's just to much for me...

STUDENT: It's like I'm in a different world all together. I did experience before, and I'm finally here. It's like I've been on top of a cloud...

STUDENT: Well, to tell you the truth, I'm kind of glad, I'm going to miss the school. Because my old teachers and how they taught us...It's been a long way for us, it's been like twelve years.

SELVIN: What do you all do now, I mean this is the big night. What do you do tomorrow, what do you do next week.

STUDENT: My life has just begun right now. It's just begun.

STUDENT: You know how it is in the world. You've got to be on your own. It's lonesome out there, you know, in a way I'm scared, right now. I'm like a little kid. If you can face the world, if you can do that.

TEACHER: One of my students came in this morning looking very down and out and I said to her: "What's your problem". She said "I feel like the bottom has just fallen out of my life" And I said, "well, you're going to graduate in a few days". Her response was : "Yeah, I'm going to graduate to what?" And I think that's a question that's very real to them and it kind of throws a pall over the future. I think our world does have a lot of questions out there. Are we going to even survive? or are we going to have enough energy, enough food stuff, enough natural resources to continue. I don't know if they think as seriously about that as they should. But they're not as comfortable in looking into the future as we are, because they have a lot less, in many ways, to look forward to.

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TEACHER: You have worked twelve long years for this night. Come prepared to take part in the most serious program. Keep this in mind when giving out your tickets. Please do not invite persons who might embarrass you. You're class or Mergenthaler. Show that you are as proud of yourself and your achievement as we are.

TEACHER: On that stage, you can conduct yourself proudly as adults, Realizing the achievement of your school. Or you may conduct yourselves immaturely. I would like to see all of us that evening walk away from the graduation, knowing that we have truly, in every sense, graduated. Because we have graduated with dignity, with pride and with honor. Congratulations to each one of you. We have a great confidence in you. I'm very proud of you and I expect that night to be able to say after graduation that I'm bursting out with pride.....Thank you very much. (applause)

TEACHER: Alright, now you know how proud we all are of you, and we expect that Mergenthaler is number one and it remains that way.

MERROW: Everything is ready for this big moment. It's been twelve years in the coming. The chandeliers are lit, the ribbons are hung, the flowers are on stage, the trees are on stage, everything is draped in white and blue, the school colors. It's very similar to every other graduation I've ever seen. Probably, every other graduation that will be taking place in this country this year. It's probably very similar to your graduation. The rituals are the same, the students are wearing cap and gown, the women are wearing yellow, the men are wearing blue, the band is warming up downstairs, and everybody is getting ready for this great moment. The certainties are that some five hundred people, some five hundred students will walk up on that stage, tonight, and get their High School Diploma. The uncertainty is what happens after that. What effect that High School Diploma will have on their life, what meaning it will have once they leave this great auditorium tonight. That's uncertain. But tonight, they will be graduating.

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(Announcement of the names of the Graduates - Diploma award)

SELVIN: You're son is graduating, how do you feel?

PARENT: Very good.

SELVIN: Why is that?

PARENT: Well, for one thing he's achieving something that I didn't do. It makes me very happy and I hope he'll do a lot of things that I didn't do that I wish I had done. And for this reason, I'm very glad for him.

SELVIN: Do you think a High School Diploma is important?

PARENT: Yes, I think a High School Diploma is very important because most the people that I know, around my age group, that didn't get it, now they wish they had.

SELVIN: If you had a chance to get up on that podium tonight, and give some advice to all those graduates out there, what would you tell them?

PARENT: It's your world, and it may not be everything you expect, but until something better comes along, it's all you've got, so make the most of it.

STUDENT: One broken dream is not the end of dreaming. One shattered hope is not the end of hoping. Beyond the storm and tempest, stars are gleaming. Still build your castles, though your castles fall. Though many dreams come tumbling in disaster, and pain and heartache meet you down the years, still keep your faith, your hopes to master, and never cry that you have ceased to dream.

STUDENT: The past twelve years of our education have been during some turbulent years. We have witnessed many changes on the earth. We were born at the end of the baby-boom. We have lived through some of the most prosperous years in the United States. We have seen the Civil Rights

(cont'd): movements. We saw men land on the moon and the opening of a vast space exploration. The Cuban Missile Crisis, the Kennedy and King assassinations. We've seen techonology make leaps and bounds. And we've seen the Vietnam War, Watergate, inflation and recession. We've seen many things. Now, it's our turn to join in the ranks of history.

(announcement of Graduates' names - Diploma award)

GUEST: Now that I got up about two years ago, now it really doesn't mean that much. You go through the whole graduation and what it takes isn't all that just to get a diploma. All things are really worth it. You can get it at the school, just like you get it a bus-pass, or whatever.

SELVIN: That's a good point. Most people who are sitting in that audience, the graduates tonight, they're really excited. This is a big moment in their life. But how much does it really mean?

GUEST: So why shatter their ego?

GUEST: I don't think it's meaning nothing. Because they're going to need it. To get in anything else, say, you need further training. You must have that. You've got to have that and I'm glad for them because I got mine. I went out to get it, I got it and I'm happy for them. I like to see them get them. But the commencement, that's the only part that messes it up. If they cannot really...it's a big enjoyment. When I was sitting on that stage, I was so glad. First thing for everything. First time for me. I guess for him. But sitting in an audience and thinking back to the time when you did it, you know how the graduate feels.

STUDENT: I feel a little sad. You won't be seeing all these people you made really good friends with. But, go on to better and bigger things, that's the way to look at it. Don't cry. Because you're losing ties with what you have now, but because you have something else to move on tc

STUDENT: Believe that it's over. Just doing and seeing. But now it's a brand new ball game.

* * *

(applause)

(The Processional)

MERROW: This program was produced for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION by David Selvin. Portions of the actual commencement were recorded at the Woodrow Wilson Senior High School in Washington D.C. We'd like to thank everyone at Mergenthaler, in Baltimore, Maryland who participated in the making of this program, especially Milt Wilson.

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MERROW: On the subject of funding and our future, we're pleased to announce that OPTIONS IN EDUCATION has been refunded by Carnegie Corporation. That means, we'll be around for another two years. Our special thanks to Carnegie.

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OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is written and produced by JoEllyn Rackleff and John Merrow. The assistant producer is Katharine Ferguson. And I'm Wendy Blair.